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Reflection on Participating in the 2018 Senior Play:
The Wonderful World of Dissocia

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LOD: 2018 Senior Play Reflection

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2018 Senior Play Reflection

After being responsible for the whole production team for three months, my biggest impression is that it is never easy to make drama.

When I decided to enter the selection of director, all I wanted to do is to create the most successful senior play that ever occur in ENG department. However, things were not what I imagined to be.

The first challenge I encountered was choosing the script. I surfed many sites, read about lots of introductions of playwright and director, but no one gave me the right emotion. I looked up Tony Award, Pulitzer Prize, and Drama Desk Award winners from 1980 to now. Facing so many unfamiliar scripts, I definitely do not have a chance to read them all. The resource of scripts is not always available as well. Thus, aimlessly wandering in the Internet for at least one month, I was at a loss.

So I went to Rita and Autumn, two former directors of Senior Play. They shared precious experiences to me. Autumn gave me some resources of play scripts. Rita even had a long-time phone call with me, teaching me what a production team includes and some preparation to do ahead of time. Most importantly, I poured out the pressure and fatigue during that month. Both of them understood me, and they both agreed that this is just the beginning. I knew I need to prepare for a big challenge.

When consulting Hegel, the instructor of this year's Senior Play, I received the suggestion that knowing what I want to express is the most important thing. He said that although the scripts have their subject, what I want to deliver directs my choice. This advice opened my mind. The intrinsic quality of drama is to express. So I should emphasis on what I want to say instead of getting lost in topics.

Finally, I decided to choose a script called People, Places & Things. It's a 2015 script written by British playwright Duncan Macmillan. It's a story happening in a

rehabilitation, talking about the protagonist Emma, who is an actress and also a drug addict, taking medical care in this rehab. Emma cannot distinguish the life of a character and the life in the real world. However, she actually loves the psychedelic life that drug brought her. In the end, she shouted out philosophical questions of alive and death.

I like this script very much because I see some features of modern people from it. Nowadays, modern products like smartphone and Internet gradually become parasite to us. We cannot live without them. What I want to express float up to the surface: I want audiences to face the illusion of Emma, so as to think about their “illusions” create by modern products.

With this objective, I started to form my team. I want my team to be efficient and effective, and I want my team to be cohesive. First of all, the team needs the separation of powers. That means director take charge of actors and assistant directors, stage manager (two of them) are being responsible for every technical group, and the executive is in charge of groups of publicity and art & design. I delivered messages to every group leader and every main leader, asking for their willingness to join the team. It took some time but it's worthy for the most proper candidates I could find. After explaining to them my ideas, we held weekly meeting to discuss the script. Based on everyone's job, we brainstorm many useful ideas. Although this process was tough and tiring, and we were actually holding a “cross-strait” group meeting, we had made progress.

Moreover, during the summer vacation, the whole production schedule had been completed. I had several feelings when the vacation ended. First, paperwork, research and discussion are very important preparation before entering the rehearsal room. Second, being a director also need to deal with complicated personnel management.

After holding an audition, nine actors and actresses were on board. During September and early October, our team operated smoothly. Everything seemed to be good.

Until one day, the disaster broke out. The copyright group rejected our request to pay the performing fee because the copyright is not allowed to be released. Maybe it's

because this production is relatively new and still in a tour. The instructor suggested we change the script.

We main leaders were shocked. I remember the night when I received the email which sentenced our production to “death”. I was at a real loss. Sometimes I didn’t know what to do. Worrying about the script every day, I was always thinking. I thought when eating and thought when sleeping.

Tracing back to the beginning, this was not an accident. When choosing the script, the director need to check the copyright. So it’s counted my fault. However, as a leader, there was no time for me blaming myself, I have to recover quickly. Here came two choices for me: I can still use this script regardless of possible punishment, or I find another one during one week, with all of our ideas wasted.

After thorough thinking, I finally decided to change the script. On the one hand, we seniors are going to graduate and start working in the society, it is essential learning to respect everyone’s hard work. Escaping punishment maybe succeed, but we must be honest to ourselves. On the other hand, this script is way more difficult than we imagined. It requires a professional team and may not fit a student production.

I am very appreciated that main leaders and assistant directors tried to comfort me and said “It’s not your fault. Let’s face it together.” Without them, it would be harder to carry on.

The new script is called The Wonderful World of Dissocia. When finding new script, I stuck to my original ideas. And this script talks about illusion and imaginative world from another angle. The protagonist Lisa has dissociative disorder, which means she has multiple identities. This disorder is usually caused by big trauma during childhood. The story talks about Lisa going to an imaginary world called Dissocia to find her “Lost Hour”. The world is full of weird people who dress and act strangely. They resist Lisa to find the hour which is the heart of the world. At the meantime, the Black Dog King is attacking this world, threatening the citizens to surrender their Queen Sarah. The story is similar to Alice in Wonderland and The Wizard of Oz. It’s a comedy full of British jokes and metaphor satirizing the real

world. I think this topic would be a good try on the stage of SP.

From this script, audiences could still have some fun in the imaginary world of a mental illness and think about the topic of “real and fake”, but the topic of modern technologies had to be dropped off. It’s a pity for me but I have to face my decision.

I had to comfort the actors because they were for the former script anyway. I could tell there is some disappointment on their face. One of them even chose to leave after changing the script. Also, I need to cheer up the whole team because the effort we make in the summer vacation has gone.

After all this, we finally started to rehearse. At first I was very nervous because it was my first directing experience. But as the actor and me were getting closer, I could gradually take charge the situation. I formed my habit of rehearsing. Usually, I would have a long-time warm-up that consists of 3-4 theater games. In my mind, theater games help actors aware more of their body and muscles as well as getting them into the situation.

I cut the script into pieces, and every time we rehearsed one part for the first time, I tended to use some alternative games for transition. For example, when it came to a scene of a scapegoat “begging for blame” from Lisa, the actor could not be into the character that quick. So I made up a story of a thirsty traveler begging water from a woman who has a bottle of water. When it came to scene relates to “hiding away the truth from Lisa”, I used a family game as a guide. At dinner time, every family member is hiding one secret from Lisa, the daughter. All Lisa knew is there’s something strange today. The gambling between the family and the daughter is funny.

In order to give more pictures to actors, I led them to rehearse outside. There is one scene happening in an elevator. People in the lift are making strange sound, talking about how to murder, and turning to four sides as if the door is everywhere in the lift. However, Lisa is the only “strange” one in other’s eye. I took my actors to the elevator for real. In that narrow space, we had more accurate experience and feelings.

Stepping into November, here came the bottleneck. It seemed that I could only make a framework of the whole play, but it is very hard to carve and elaborate it. So I asked Charveil for help. He taught me a lot about acting, including pace, rhythm,

facing, stage dialog... I must say that he has a power to control the situation. His artistic talent gives him many beautiful ideas of acting. At first the performance is long and boring, but Charveil added some flavor in in pot.

Music is also a big deal in November. This play has three songs, but music sheets are nowhere to be found. The official email from the playwright also says we need to develop the music ourselves. For this, we found a music coach to compose the songs based on former productions.

When December came our them started to operate in a very high speed, but Property & Setting group were not into the situation. They were negative in all ways: negative in discussing; did not have a complete list of property; always making props after the deadline... I asked stage manager to deal with it, but I found that stage managers even made props for them! It suddenly reminds me that the executive is also a leader who wants everyone to be happy. I learned that the main leaders I chose may have similar traits of “caring” when working. I’m not saying that caring is a wrong attitude when working, but when every leader cares the members too much, the “care” will become “conniving”. For me, I learned that if I’m the boss, I should hire different type of colleagues who could coordinate with each other.

Another tough task was character setting. Before the day we rehearse in the SF theater, the character setting was finally decided. This is the task that should be done at the beginning, but I changed the worldview and character setting too many times, leading to the loss of the actors.

The last week was exhausted but wonderful. Everyone tried their best to do their job. Our team tried to run ahead of time. Every day we worked from 9 in the morning to 9 at night. We did our best.

During the time in the theater, I learned that everyone who come to the theater should have their job, otherwise there is no need calling them to come. We need to use the energy on the right thing and at the right time. What’s more, communicating with each group member is very important to a director. For example, after I talk to lighting team members did I know that they were under such a huge pressure. Communication can make the team more efficient and more effective.

Five minutes before each performance, I was at the backstage, cheering up everyone, giving everyone a hug. When I cheered them up, all the sweet and sour came back to my mind in no time. We have indeed devoted to this Wonderful World of Dissocia, and it is the time that we enjoy our achievement.

Every night of the performing day, my brain was spinning and correcting the mistake of the day. Even in the dream did I wish the production can be successful.

I'm very glad that many audiences like it.

So, I would like to thank all of my team leaders and team members: the production will be nothing without you. I would like to thank all the actors: it is due to our practice and discussion the wonderful world can be created. Also I would like to thank all main leaders, Charveil, and our instructor Hegel: I learned a lot from all of you. Your support helps me carry on. I appreciate that SP gives me the chance to be a director. I will keep on going on the way of drama.



